DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 421 944 HE 031 482

AUTHOR	Fincher, Cameron
TITLE	The Changing Future of Academic Leadership.
INSTITUTION	Georgia Univ., Athens. Inst. of Higher Education.
PUB DATE	1998-08-00
NOTE	8p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Institute of Higher Education, Candler Hall, University of Georgia, Athens, GA 30602-1772; phone: 706-542-3464; fax: 706-542-7588; http://service.uga.edu/ihe/
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
JOURNAL CIT	IHE Perspectives; Aug 1998
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Administrator Characteristics; *Administrator Role; Change; *College Administration; Futures (of Society); Higher Education; *Leadership; *Organizational Change; Specialization; *Trend Analysis

ABSTRACT

This discussion of changes in administrative roles and responsibilities within institutions of higher education suggests that these roles may change substantially in the first decade of the 21st century as the constituencies of American colleges and universities change. Analysis of a variety of trends in organizational structure suggests that future leaders at institutions of higher education will be more elitist, more career-minded, and more transient. Specific trends suggest that there will be increasing numbers of leaders at such institutions; that these leaders will be increasingly diverse in race, ethnic origin, experience, preparation, and competence; that they will have more specialized skills; that they will be more dependent on professional staff services; that they will follow career paths marked by increased professionalization and more mobility among institutions; and that an elitist notion of leadership will persist despite trends toward participatory decision making. The paper concludes that both change and continuity are essential in all facets of institutional leadership. (Contains 13 references.) (DB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

IHE PERSPECTIVES AUGUST 1998

ED 421 944

The Changing Future of Academic Leadership

by Cameron Fincher

HE 031 482

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Institute for H.E.
Univ of Georgia

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

The Changing Future of Academic Leadership

by Cameron Fincher

In the 1990s it has been obvious that one generation of leaders in American colleges and universities is leaving and another generation is arriving. And if new generations do not always live up to the expectations of their predecessors, the similarities and differences between generations are nonetheless informative and comparisons can be quite interesting.

If asking what constitutes a generation of leaders, we should look at more than the average length of presidential tenure that is often given as five-to-seven years. And since many presidents continue, in one capacity or another, to serve the larger field of higher education, we can not identify a generation of leaders by their retirement age. In any given year, many presidents will retire but other presidents will resign and assume other duties.

Occasionally there is a minimum of overlap between outgoing and incoming generations, suggesting a significant disjunction, if not a dramatic change. Those of us who remember the 1960s would agree that "disjunction" was a salient feature of the decade. We would agree also that during "that era," one generation of institutional leaders was indeed replaced by another. Should we accept "a significant disjunction" as one criterion and "evidence of continuity" as another, we could identify three or four generations of institutional leaders over the past forty years.

Since the 1950s change and continuity have been revealing characteristics of institutional leadership in higher education. College presidents and academic deans have witnessed many significant and pervasive changes, but certain patterns of authority and responsibility persist. The role and responsibilities of department heads have changed in various ways while those of vice presidents and deans have expanded in logical and predictable ways. The centralization of governance in statewide coordinating or governing boards has altered appreciably the administration of public colleges and universities. In brief, the functions and activities of academic administration have changed frequently as institutions respond to public perceptions, demands, and expectations. At the same time, administrative roles and responsibilities retain many of their essential and conventional features.

Changing Perspectives

From his perspective on college students, John Gardner *(1965)* wrote that many of the nation's brightest students, to all appearances, had been carefully schooled to avoid the responsibilities of leadership. In his later reflections on leadership Gardner *(1990)* wrote that coalition builders were needed to formulate goals and values that would gain the commitment of others to larger objectives. Also needed were networks of responsibility that would permit continuous collaboration among the sectors of society and nation, identifying issues and moving toward consensus. Contemporary leaders, he suggested, have a limited understanding of the organized systems and institutions through which they must realize their goals and aspirations. As the size and complexity of institutions and organizations increase, their vitality is weakened by excessive bureaucracy and other failings that are characteristic of large-scale systems. The necessity of working with large-scale and complex systems thus becomes a challenge to contemporary *and* future leaders.

A similar perspective was provided earlier by Phillip Selznick *(1957)* who saw large-scale

organizations as needing responsible and creative leadership. Design and maintenance were engineering problems, but responsible leadership is the blending of commitment, understanding, and determination that brings together the self-knowledge of the leader and the identity of the institution. Creative leadership embodies the institution with purpose by its concern for change and reconstruction—and by analyzing the environment to determine how best to use the institution's resources and capabilities. Thus institutions are created by infusing routine functions and activities with purpose and meaning.

Another insightful perspective was given by James Webb *(1969)*. As head of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration in its most productive years, Webb would make large-scale organizations responsive and adaptive by helping their leaders prepare for administrative conditions that are unforeseen. Organizational leaders should seek patterns of organization and administration that facilitate early detections of failure *and* awareness of emerging opportunities. The new art of management, as he saw it in the 1960s, should make allowances for the unknown and the indeterminate. Webb was obviously skeptical of systems engineering and advocated a participative and/or collaborative decision-making process that involved various levels of authority—and kept in mind the objectives of the organization as a whole.

As a university president and economist, Howard Bowen *(1978)* provided a perspective on the social costs of changing demands in academic leadership. In his estimation, the cost to colleges and universities was no less than 8 to 10 percent (2.1 billion dollars) of educational and general expenditures. Offices, campus agencies, and appendages to central offices thus expand the administrative structure of institutions large and small. In many such cases, new administrative units with full-time directors are mandated by federal and state government, funding agencies and sponsors, and constituencies pressing for representation in institutional policy decisions. Thus, the confusion of administrative responsibilities in large-scale organizations and institutions is often compounded by the conflicting lines of authority, responsibility, and communication.

From his encyclopedic perspective on leadership Bernard Bass *(1990)* suggested that college students, in the 1980s, placed a much stronger emphasis on leadership. Productivity and morale, as seen by students, are dependent upon leaders who are participative, concerned about their employees, and who offer praise and recognition for good performance. Bass believes that the future will bring further research on personal qualities, charismatic leadership, and the cognitive processes involved in leader-constituent relations. He, too, believes that the cultural, social, and economic changes taking place in the last half of the 20th century require re-examination of the structures and functional relationships established earlier in the century. The substance of research will be influenced by the societal changes taking place, by new technologies available to researchers, and by the revolution in information processing and communications. Having the benefit of such perspectives, it is relevant to ask where the next generation of leaders is coming from, what their distinctive characteristics will be, and how the next generation differs from their predecessors?

THE NEXT GENERATION

To at least one observer, the complexity of society, its diverse institutions, and its innumerable associations and organizations imply a continuing diversification of leader behavior and leadership roles. As diversification proceeds, leaders will be separated from their followers and communicate more and more with other leaders. An outcome of such trends could be an increasing elitism among leaders who would form their own coalitions for multiple purposes and with rapidly changing agendas *(Fincher, 1987; 1996)*.

The organizational structures of colleges and universities, federal and state government, corporate business and finance, and other societal institutions are undeniably complex. There are many indications that smaller, closely knit, more efficient or effective organizational

structures are in the best interests of the general public and the multitudes of constituents, but trends are to the contrary. Considering such trends, their direction and their momentum, there are good reasons to believe that future leaders will be more numerous, more diverse, *and* more specialized. Given public expectations for participatory democracy and representative government, there is hope that leadership will be more professional, more technically proficient, and better staffed. And taking all such possibilities as likely, it is altogether possible that leaders in the future will be more elitist, more career-minded, and more transient. The implications of such trends and their likely outcomes are cause for institutional concern.

... it is altogether possible that leaders in the future will be more elitist, more career-minded, and more transient.

Increasing Numbers: The national pool of potential leaders is amazing. John Gardner *(1990)* estimated that among the American people there may be as many as 2.4 million (one percent of the national population) who are prepared to take action as a leader. At first glance, Gardner's estimate is encouragingly high. When considered in terms of the numerous positions and situations in which one individual is partially responsible for the actions of others, his estimate is much too low. Given the personal, social, situational, and organizational complexities of contemporary life, a substantial proportion of the nation's population will behave as leaders on occasion. More than a few of them will be members of groups at some time or another when their actions can be interpreted as provisional leadership. In the nation's 3600+ colleges and universities we will find at least 3600 presidents or chancellors. If we estimate (cautiously) the number of vice presidents, deans, directors, and department heads required by 3600+ institutions for administration and governance, the number of individuals in positions of potential or actual leadership will exceed sixty thousand—without considering the leadership of related agencies, associations, and organizations.

Increases in the number of future leaders will be, no doubt, a function of the many social and organizational forces at play in the late 1990s. As new and different forms of international cooperation are developed, more leaders will represent the multinational and interrelated interests of business, government, and higher education. As diverse interest groups seek a more active role in a culturally pluralistic society, more leaders will represent their beliefs and values in public forums and in the corridors of public policy. Thus a direct implication of dispersed leadership in the nation is the likelihood that future leaders will spend more time representing group interests *and* less time with their constituents. When the absence of leaders results in the alienation of group members, other groups will be organized and thereby acquire other leaders.

Increased Diversity: As a large but identifiable group, future leaders may be excessively diverse. Not only will they display increased diversity in ascribed characteristics such as gender, race, and ethnic origin, they will differ greatly in experience, preparation, knowledge, and competence. Given the possibility that each will have been chosen for specific purposes, they will differ even more in perspective, insight, and understanding. When leaders are selected by organized groups to represent their best interests, fallacies in representation will often be involved. As a result, diversity in leadership may have more symbolic value than substance. Rapid turnover is a likely outcome, and leaders may be regarded as interchangeable parts in organizational machinery— as baseball managers and football coaches are.

The diversity of leaders has many implications for the effectiveness of academic leadership. Chosen by culturally diverse groups, representative leaders will differ in the attitudes, beliefs, values, and problem-solving

strategies they bring to the public forums in which major policy decisions are discussed. Unfortunately, diversity *per se* does not assure sensitivity to group needs, effective communication and rapport, or the ability to cooperate with others in pursuit of common interests.

. . . institutional leaders may leave too many decisions to staff assistants and intervene only when mistakes must be corrected.

Increased Specialization: The specialization of leadership is assured by the particular needs and demands of the positions held by leaders. In the case of organized groups, leaders will no doubt concentrate on social and interpersonal skills that assist in representing groups, associations, or organizations. In higher education, specialization will often defer to general and/or academic leadership, but in divisions of business and finance, student affairs, research, public service, and institutional advancement leaders will be specialized. As more specialists are trained for particular functions, the probability of increased specialization is quite high in program planning, internal communications, direction and coordination, and assessment or evaluation. A corollary of such specialization is the likelihood that leaders in operational positions will become even more technocratic, placing an emphasis on proficiency that is unappreciated by superiors and resented by subordinates. Another implication is the technocratic use of communications media in representing organizational or institutional interests and in promoting the public image of leaders *(See Kouzes & Posner, 1989).*

Staff Services: The increasing dependence of leadership on professional staff services implies that more institutional decisions will be made in sessions of administrative teams or advisory councils that can convene quickly and agree on proposed strategy or tactics. To some extent, the decision making structures of institutions will become a part of "invisible networks" of communications and consultation. The locus of decisions will become even more difficult to identify, and the accountability of decision makers for their decisions will become even more diffuse.

The increased use of professional staffs implies a greater degree of responsibility for staff recruitment, development, and evaluation. Presidents and vice presidents will have no difficulty in attracting competent staff members if they offer an opportunity for genuine career advancement. Other staff positions, with reputations for busywork or as deadends, will be shunned in the future as they have been in the past. The ambivalence of many senior administrators toward staff development must be overcome in ways that are beneficial to the institution, as well as administrators and staff assistants. Current administrative leaders vary greatly in their efforts to develop professional staffs that can function as an administrative team. Some learn by trial and error—and eventually succeed; others muddle through and their failures are concealed by good fortune *(See Birnbaum, 1989).*

Career Patterns: The changing career patterns of academic administrators suggests that the early entry of aspiring leaders will be followed by frequent changes of positions and institutions. The career patterns of presidents also reflect the conventional wisdom of coming up through administrative ranks, but the ascent of department heads, directors, and vice presidents within the same institution may become the exception instead of the norm. Not only are colleges and universities reluctant to develop their own leadership, they continue to believe that other institutions can do a better job of preparing presidents and deans. As a result, some career patterns suggest that when administrators become competent, they can serve better elsewhere.

Career patterns also reflect the continuing professionalization of academic administration. More administrators will begin their careers

with an administrative appointment, seek new appointments more frequently, and benefit personally from a career involving a variety of administrative posts. Some patterns will clearly indicate that administrative leaders and their constituents do not identify strongly with each other. On occasion institutions are served well by energetic, aggressive, and highly mobile presidents, vice presidents, or deans but most institutions are served best when administrative leaders and institutions can learn, develop, and mature together. Officials who merely preside can remain in positions of leadership by attracting staff members who are energetic, aggressive, and highly mobile—and who benefit from a stint under the tutelage of older, wiser mentors (*See Kerr & Gade, 1986; Green, 1988*).

Elitist Leaders: In the wake of participatory decision making and direct democracy, the notion of a leadership elite does not sit well in the plans and preferences of many governing boards. And yet, an elitist notion of leadership persists despite all bows in the direction of meritocracy, fairness, or equity. A concern with gender, race, and ethnic origin in the recruitment, selection, and appointment of academic administrators has not eliminated a concern for the social origin, academic discipline, personal prestige, and national reputation of presidential candidates—and other administration positions where a high premium is placed on academic credentials. The presidents of prestigious universities differ in many ways from the presidents of state universities with a strong emphasis on teacher education. Presidents of four-year liberal arts colleges differ appreciably from presidents of community colleges. Very seldom is a candidate from one kind of institution chosen as the president of another kind of institution. By the same standards, no national conference or annual meeting of any professional society or educational association will attract a representative sample of the nation's presidents, vice presidents, deans, or department heads (*Fincher, 1997*).

When salaries, benefits, and perquisites of presidents, vice presidents, and deans are considered, their disparities with faculty and staff salaries are increasing. Universities that praise themselves on being the nation's most democratic institution perceive no inequities in the salaries of presidents and assistant professors. To the contrary, higher salaries for the former are justified on the grounds that the financial benefits of the presidency is out of line with the salaries and benefits of chief-executive-officers in business, industry, and finance.

A more telling implication of future academic leadership is the possibility that not only will administrative leaders be more elitist, career-minded, and transient but more of them will be increasingly absentee and passive. This could mean that institutional leaders may leave too many decisions to staff assistants and intervene only when mistakes must be corrected. Academic leaders who are not present and actively engaged in major policy decisions will provide a highly dubious form of academic leadership.

In Summary

Given the changing demands and expectations of the 1990s, the status and functions of leadership in the first decade of a new century may be quite different. The challenges of rapid technological and organizational change, coupled with incremental social and cultural changes, are extensive and intricate. For well over fifty years institutions of higher education have changed as public perceptions and expectations have changed. The demographic characteristics of students, faculties, alumni, trustees, and administrative leaders have changed in many ways. Should trends continue as they are expected to do, the constituencies of American colleges and universities will change appreciably by the year 2010. The demographic characteristics of institutional leaders will reflect the many changes observed in campus constituencies, in public perceptions and expectations, and in institutional beliefs and values. The advantages and benefits

of technological and organizational change are identified more readily than the cumulative effects of social and cultural change. But the impact of social and cultural change on the leadership of American colleges and universities is a matter of primary concern. Diversity, once a mark of institutional strength, is now an abstraction without reliable content. Cultural diversity, with respect to racial and ethnic groups, will be more observable in future leaders, but critical observers will be hard pressed to relate cultural diversity to institutional effectiveness. In effect, the signals of social and cultural change conflict sharply with the messages of technological and organizational change.

Continuous, gradual, incremental change will be as evident in leadership as it is in institutions. The challenge to institutional leaders is to seek adaptive, responsive changes that serve institutional needs and interests. Leadership is, and will continue to be, essential to all efforts dealing with the continued intellectual and cultural advancement of American colleges and universities. Both change and continuity are essential in all facets of instituitonal leadership—and emphasizing one to the detriment of the other makes little sense.❖

References

Bass, Bernard M. (1990). *Bass and Stogdill's handbook of leadership: Theory, research, and managerial applications* (3rd ed.). New York: The Free Press.

Birnbaum, Robert. (1989). *How colleges work: The cybernetics of academic organization and leadership.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Bowen, Howard R. (1979). Socially imposed costs of higher education. In *Conflict, retrenchment, and reappraisal: The administration of higher education.* The David D. Henry Lectures 1972-1978. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Fincher, Cameron. (1987). Administrative leadership in higher education. In John C. Smart (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (Vol. III). New York: Agathon Press.

Fincher, Cameron. (1996). Theory and research in administrative leadership. In John C. Smart (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (Vol. IX). New York: Agathon Press.

Fincher, Cameron. (1997). *Presidential Qualifications and Institutional Structure.* Athens: Institute of Higher Education, University of Georgia.

Gardner, John W. (1965). *The antileadership vaccine.* Reprinted from the 1965 Annual Report, Carnegie Corporation of New York.

Gardner, John W. (1990). *On leadership.* New York: The Free Press.

Green, Madeleine F. (Ed.). (1988). *Leaders for a new era: Strategies for higher education.* New York: Macmillan Publishing.

Kerr, Clark & Gade, Marian L. (1986). *The many lives of academic presidents: Time, place and character.* Washington, D.C.: Association of Governing Boards.

Kouzes, James M. & Posner, Barry Z. (1989). *The leadership challenge: How to get extraordinary things done in organizations.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Selznick, Philip. (1957). *Leadership in administration: A sociological interpretation.* Evanston, IL: Row, Peterson & Co.

Webb, James E. (1969). *Space age management: The large-scale approach.* New York: McGraw-Hill.

❖*Additional copies of this newsletter may be obtained from writing or faxing the Institute of Higher Education.*